"The child has returned": Malcolm X, Pan-Africanism, and Interculturation

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While Malcolm X's cultural understanding stems primarily from his family background with a mother of Caribbean roots and his demeaning experiences in America, his acquired intercultural subjectivity is mainly due to his conversion to Sunni Islam following his *hajj* in 1964. His ill-famed negation of contemporary American culture and society drives him to look for cultural roots elsewhere, first in Elijah Muhammad's Islam, then in Sunni Islam, and, finally, in black Africa. His Pan-African strivings can thus be seen as both an ontological and cosmological undertaking, but from the point of intercultural communication, as a series of acts in the process of interculturation. Learning and re-learning his self in relation to a newly discovered Africa change his view of the American homeland, but, importantly, they also signify a shift from an essentially monocultural self-concept sustained by a mythicized Africa to one that allows for cultural exchange and appropriation. It is this aspect of cultural change that the study explores based on his speeches following his *hajj* and his journey across Africa, the main focus being his intercultural immersion which also has an impact on his view of America.

Beyond religious conversion, *hajj* for Malcolm X facilitates also a cultural conversion that inherently transforms his cultural identity. His touring of Africa, including visits to Egypt, Nigeria, and Ghana, leads him to unite Africa culturally into one cosmos and incorporate African Americans into it. The move may not be surprising for a person with a Garveyite father as is true of Malcolm X. Yet, that is too easy a conclusion to draw, considering his view of his father and his turn away from the Black Church and Christianity altogether. His *hajj* experience allows him to reinterpret the racial element in his view of America: "I no longer subscribe to sweeping indictments of anyone race [sic]. My religious pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca has given me a new insight into the true brotherhood of Islam, which encompasses all the races of mankind" ("Letter to the Egyptian Gazette" par. 3). His visit to various African nations, however, where he is hailed predominantly by anti-American Marxist politicians as not just a leader, but a representative member of the African American community and even called "Omowale," meaning "the child has returned" ("We Are All Blood Brothers" 5), by Muslim students in Nigeria, helps him identify an African personality into which he willingly sutures African Americans.

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As an attempt against any transcendence of race (Tibebu 109), Edward Wilmot Blyden's concept of the "African personality" (200-01), incorporating for him components such as the "spirit of cooperation, collectivity, equality, and spiritual expression" (Conyers 155), proves a significant initial trigger of the Pan-African discourse. The respective concept was strongly promoted by other 19th century thinkers such as Alexander Crummell, the Episcopalian minister, whose exhortation that "You should claim with regard to this continent that "'THIS IS OUR AFRICA,' in all her gifts, and in her budding grace and glory" (52) and the abolitionist Martin Robison Delany, whose request for "Africa for the African race and black men to rule them" (61) was later picked up as slogans by Pan-Africanists. These predecessors grant a background for Malcolm X's thinking in that they delineate a cultural universe that withstands theories and practices of cultural erasure. Especially Blyden's case shows that, beyond identifying roots and a cultural core, he significantly maps a political/cultural/educational roadmap to work toward a Pan-African unity (Conyers 153), later to be utilized by Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's president in Malcolm X's time, for whom the liberation process of African nations represents that "above the world's horizon loomed the African Personality" (425). The possible recognition of an African personality in the diaspora is, however, overshadowed in DuBois's theorizing by his concept of "double consciousness," which represents a shift toward a "socio-historical notion" of race ("The Uncompleted Argument" 23), instead of a spiritual bond among people of African descent. In his *Dusk of Dawn* DuBois asserts that "But the physical bond is least and the badge of color is relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together" (117). DuBois's anti-colonial nationalism represents from another point of view "romantic racialism" (*Father's House* 101)—insisting on an ancient black civilization—notions that are debunked, acknowledged, and further developed by Malcom X.

Interculturation may be perceived more directly between Africans and African Americans than any reciprocity in the case of religious interculturation between Muslims and African Americans. The Pan-African preoccupation of President Nkrumah shows that African self-conception reaches well beyond national borders and even beyond Africa to incorporate, from his perspective, the African American diaspora: "It must be understood that liberation movements in Africa, the struggle of Black Power in America or in any other part of the world, can only find consummation in the political unification of Africa, the home of the black man and people of African descent throughout the world" (Nkrumah 427). As Katharina Schramm also points out, "the Ghanaian nation-state and its renewed rhetorical self-location within a Pan-African setting [. . .] categorically embraced

the classical African diaspora as a frame of reference" (20). For Nkrumah to extend kinship ties to African Americans means building alliances politically, but, culturally, rebuilding a community locally by contextualizing Africans globally—an important move in the wake of African nation states to strengthen self-worth and ascribe valence to themselves.

From Malcolm X's perspective, interculturation evolves along similar lines. The kinship ties he identifies or allows to be identified by establish political loyalties, the prime example being his initiative to jointly submit a plea with African heads of state to the United Nations to condemn American policies against African Americans as a crime against humanity. From the point of view of identity politics, he importantly rids himself of a minority position by claiming membership in a Pan-African community: "We think of things worldly, or as the world is; we think of our part in the world, and we look upon ourselves not as a dark minority on the white American stage, but rather we look upon ourselves as a part of the dark majority who now prevail on the world stage" ("Afro-American History" par. 5). As member of a significant cultural group, he finds external support to practice intragroup communication, which nurtures self-rewarding identity negotiation.

Leaving behind America in this way and placing himself elsewhere in a different cultural space helps him reinterpret the concept of color—the primary token of African American suppression. As he claims,

> You see the nations of the earth that are black, brown, red, and yellow, who used to be down, now getting up. And when you see them, you find that you look more like them than you look like Sam. And then you find yourself relating to them, whereas you formerly tried to relate to Sam. When you relate to them, you're related to the majority. But when you relate to Uncle Sam, you automatically become a minority relative. ("Afro-American History" par. 6)

Reflecting on his *hajj* makes him see that color can be magnified, but also nullified by a religious discourse, and his African experience renders it a socio-political and cultural category. Up to his Muslim and African experiences, color signifies a barrier of many kinds and a detachment as well: "You can't lay claim to any culture as long as you use the word Negro to identify yourself. It attaches you to nothing. It doesn't even identify your color" ("Afro-American History" par. 23). As a difference, color facilitates and embalms cultural disruption, discontinuation, and displacement in America. However, color loses its negative connotations in black Africa; quite to the contrary, it turns into an identity-strengthening element and becomes value-laden. When he claims that "Just as a tree without roots is dead, a people without history or cultural roots also becomes a dead people"

("Afro-American History" par. 25), he does not, therefore, argue for the abolition of the color concept, but for its reinterpretation. Especially as he explains, "[. . .] when you look at us, those of us who are called Negro, we're called that because we are like a dead people. We have nothing to identify ourselves as part of the human family" ("Afro-American History" par. 25); the obstacle of blackness as a stigma of displacement also presents the possibility of overcoming it. Reconfiguring blackness and embracing the black continent grants him a means of identification by establishing positive difference within a historical and spatial context.

Homecoming has then two important aspects: spatial and temporal. Rediscovering Africa anew represents a shift in self-identification—significantly, however, not by distancing from America, in the first place, as was the case previously in his Nation of Islam phase. The mythical Africa in Muhammad's ideology-informed theologizing signifies primarily oppositionality to white America, which is why it remains confabulation in a minority position despite the heroic black past it insists on. Brandon Kendhammer mentions a similar, typical notion of anti-colonial nationalism: "while it 'rejects' foreign domination and asserts the cultural worth of its own 'nation,' it also implicitly accepts its own inferiority and need to modernize its society" (56). Malcolm X's trans-spatial maneuver overcomes the minority constraint, attempting to place African Americans in a context devoid of any inferiority complex induced by race. This remains valid despite the fact that he searches for validation of self elsewhere, thus identification with the place, that is, America, may not appear intact. Stuart Hall's conceptualization of cultural identity entails not just difference recognized, but the acceptance of origins elsewhere (228-9), "fundamentally puncturing the notion that territorial association or land and cultural affiliation are natural sources of identification" (Kalra et al 32). Further than that, for Malcolm X, homecoming signifies the negation of social categorization and the essence of the quest for self—two notions Hall also identifies with difference: "[. . .] difference challenges the fixed binaries which stabilize meaning and representation and show how meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings [. . .]" (229). Malcolm Little/X/Shabazz, the hustler/NOI minister/Sunni convert/Pan-Africanist leader, has always withstood fixity, proving the ability of constant transformation and granting himself temporal continuation despite geographical and social displacement. Malcolm X's Pan-African diasporic identity bears relevance in this regard: Spatial disruption does not cause temporal disruption and identification with a place elsewhere can aid identity salience in the here and now. The two-directional notion of homecoming entails thus identification with an imagined/real land while it also emerges as "the central, unavoidable, unifying cultural force against the notion of the nation" (Kalra et al 30)—in Malcolm X's case white America.

Therefore, repatriation is not an issue with Malcolm X. Being part of the black majority suffices to grant spatial integration in the diaspora, while fostering repatriation would mean yielding to the minoritization of African Americans—that, in a parallel fashion, amounts to sheer escapism or otherworldliness that Malcolm X accuses black churches of as an NOI minister. Instead, he advocates spiritual reunion to establish the Black Atlantic continuum:

> And I believe this, that if we migrated back to Africa culturally, philosophically and psychologically, while remaining here physically, the spiritual bond that would develop between us and Africa through this cultural, philosophical and psychological migration, so-called migration would enhance our position here, because we would have our contacts with them acting as roots or foundations behind us. ("On Going Back to Africa" 210)

Trans-spatiality does not simply refer to the adoption of African ways or the adherence to a distant, mythicized continent, but to an active symbiosis with group members that allows inhabiting a place elsewhere, that is, Africa, and the American landscape.

Much as Malcolm X's stand may be taken as still very ideological and can be understood in terms of what Paul Gilroy identifies as "cultural insiderism" (3) and "absolute ethnicity" (84),[1] he is aware of the heterogeneity of Africans and the possible non-acceptance of African Americans by African blacks: "After lengthy discussions with many Africans at all levels, I would say some would be welcome and some wouldn't be welcome. Those that have a contribution to make would be welcome, but those that have no contribution to make would not be welcome" ("On Going Back to Africa" 210). Schramm also mentions resignation on the Africans' part over the "homecoming" of foreigners: "Especially those who professed radical views [. . .] were perceived as strangers, and, worse, as Americans" (69-70). Malcolm X perceives this ambivalence and, addressing university students in Ghana, he professes to be an insider: "I'm from America but I'm not an American" ("University of Ghana" 11). Taking Ghanaians for "blood brothers" represents an interculturating move, which emphasizes commonalities and seeks to unite, importantly, not just on a rhetorical level. Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic representing the hybrid and heterogeneous diasporic self withstanding identity closure bears relevance to the critique of academic mystification of belongingness

1 Building on Werner Sollors's notion of "ethnic insiderism" (13), Gilroy understands the terms as representing an "ontological essentialist" approach (32) to Blackness which places "incontestable priority over all other dimensions of their social and historical experience, cultures, and identities" (3).

to Africa, but, for a person like Malcolm X who migrates between battlefields, taking roots in the African continent signifies, beyond a rhetorical, ideological, and political tactical weapon, a phenomenological treatise, or, even, following his *hajj*, a teleological necessity. He does not embrace a "proto-national group with its own hermetically enclosed culture" (Gilroy 33), but rather retains plurality in unity by insisting on mutuality, which presupposes cultural difference and diversity. In a sense, Malcolm X dusts off Blyden's concept of an abstract African personality but in a DuBoisian fashion of doubleness.

The reconceptualized blood ties to Africa establish a temporal continuum that enables stabilization of self through revitalization, and salience. Identifying origins is thus not just a spatial matter as it can undo historical disruption. As Malcolm X states, "When you deal with the past, you're dealing with history; you're dealing actually with the origin of a thing. When you know the origin, you know the cause" ("Afro-American History" par. 3). Understanding the origin of African Americans does not simply pertain to creating a useful past, but, much rather, establishing a temporal link between a formal, rewarding self-conception—how ever well imagined it may be—and the contemporary displaced self. Beyond the possibility of recovering identity, that self envisions an identity that has the potential to construct a cultural self salient in the pool of identities in contemporary America but also internationally. Accordingly, he reaches back to a mythicized but also historically validated past: "When we were first brought here, we had different names. When we were first brought here, we had a different language. And these names and this language identified the culture that we were brought from, the land that we were brought from" ("Afro-American History" par. 25).

Malcolm X refers to one culture and one land (even if not one nation-state) as if not acknowledging the cultural/ethnic diversity and heterogeneity of the African landscape. Elsewhere he is clear about differences in Africa that, in his perception, can and have accounted for disagreement: regarding the Organization of African Unity he mentions that initially "many independent countries [. . .] were so divided against each other that they couldn't come together in a united effort and resolve any of their problems" ("Civil Rights Workers from Mississippi" 66). Yet he also emphasizes "common interests" and a "common objective" that also presupposes a common background other than geographical location or a similar historical experience of oppression. Beyond shared political interests, he identifies some shared Africanness that connects all black people. Blyden's but also DuBois's sentiment of some cultural core appears to recur as, in his straightforward manner, Malcolm X insists on "African blood, African origin, African culture, African ties [and] that deep within the subconscious of the Black man in this country, he's still more African than he is American" ("After the Bombing" 154). This aspect of his

Afrocentric worldview is well embedded in the African American cultural discourse and echoed by numerous predecessors and contemporary intellectuals such as Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright. The core of the shared African culture can be accessed for him "through the study of philosophies and psychologies, cultures and languages that did not come from our racist oppressors" (Program of OAAU). Studying Africanness becomes a matter both of a quest for self and examining the African American self prior to racialization.

Apart from individual and collective levels, interculturation also evolves on an institutional level. By seeking Pan-African alliances on an institutional level, Malcolm X tries to evade simple "imagined victories for the oppressed" (Dannin 10)—often suggested in the case of Black Muslim converts, which would equate Africa with an imagined homeland. The latter may echo Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined community, but regarding Africa, it connotes ideas of sacred Africa, the Black Atlantic, or "Mama Africa" (see, for example, Patricia de Santana Pinho). However, Malcolm X attempts to avoid treating the African homeland as imagined community. As James Tyner points out, Malcolm X maintains a "strategic view of Africa" for both its resources and its geographical location between East and West (122). With the establishment of his organization, he hopes in fact to join a geopolitical alliance with the potential to counter Western hegemony and thus to advance the plight of American blacks.

With this sentiment, Malcolm X establishes the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) following his visit to Africa in 1964, which is "patterned after the letter and spirit of the Organization of African Unity" ("Founding Rally of the OAAU" 249), a non-religious organization "to unite everyone in the Western Hemisphere of African descent into one united force" (248). Presenting a body of African collectivity in the United States entails not just an opportunity to unite African Americans, but also a chance to represent unity before the African counterpart, with which formal alliance-building becomes possible. This method is to enter the pool of African national entities and emphasize overt reconnection on a collective level. This organizational framework fosters, as he claims, "Our mutual understanding and our mutual effort toward a mutual objective [that] will bring mutual benefit to the African as well as to the Afro-American" ("On Going Back to Africa" 211). Submerging in a broader cultural framework through direct communication on an organizational level, Malcolm X, on the one hand, offers a partnership to Africans to join forces, as when he claims that "Your problems will never be fully solved until and unless ours are solved. You will never be fully respected until and unless we are also respected. You will never be recognized as free human beings until unless we are also recognized and treated as human beings. Our problem is your problem" ("Appeal" 582). On the other hand, he communicates

his emergence as a member of the African cultural group, along with a rhetorical acceptance of the authority of African heads of state, and, consequently, reliance on their guidance. The respective attitude is demonstrated when he addresses them as "the shepherd of all African peoples everywhere, whether they are still at home on the mother continent or have been scattered abroad" ("Appeal" 580).

Malcolm X returns from Africa a different person. His conversion to Sunni Islam and conversion to the African continent reveal a regenerated person devoid of previously racist preoccupations. Through trans-spatial maneuvers, he interculturates the self in that he professes to Africanness while remaining in the American diaspora. Endowed now with "a new sense of identity," "a new sense of dignity," and "a new sense of urgency" ("London School of Economics" 46), Malcolm X shows himself ready to enter a "communication dialogue" with whites ("The Pierre Berton Interview")—a possible new vista of interculturation never to be tested by him.

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